

The Students' Utilization of the Undergraduate Library

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Abstract

Through the use of surveys and observations we examined the way that students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign use their resources at the Undergraduate Library (UGL) to study. Some resources included technology like the Internet, office hours, workshops, and tutoring. We specifically focused on the racial background of the students, how often each student uses this facility, and whether or not students noticed quantifiable effects related to their use of the UGL. Our research is beneficial for the students on this campus because it raises awareness of the resources that are available. We also looked into secondary sources that provided further in depth analysis on our topic.

Introduction

Early in the planning of our project we decided to research which resources students used on the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) campus, but we decided to narrow down our research and only focus on the resources students use at the UGL. In the Discussion section we will offer background information for the UGL, a description of the resources available at the UGL, as well as integrate and interpret the data we collected so as to draw reliable and informative conclusions about the UGL. The data that we have collected came from anonymous surveys we created and posted to Facebook surveying a range of undergraduate students at the UIUC campus. We decided to collect our data by distributing an online survey through the social-networking site called Facebook. We made this decision because it was the most efficient way to quickly collect data with the limited amount of time until the end of the semester when the research was due. We posed questions (see Appendix A) based upon a student's gender, race, GPA, their use of available resources, and the impact the resources used by participants had on their success at UIUC. The results of these questions can be found in Appendix B. We generally found that students were aware of the resources available, but they did not necessarily utilize them for their own benefit. One problem we found was our inability to directly correlate the responses of the survey respondents with their gender or racial background. This caused us to switch the focus of our research from gender and race to the utilization of the resources and their impact on the students. We believe that our research is valuable to the UIUC community because it will clearly show which resources students choose to use and why. Also this research is valuable because we found very little research concerning the UGL. Therefore, our research will be added to the small collection currently available on the Internet. This

research can also help address problems with students' lack of knowledge about certain resources and what the school can do to better promote those unknown resources.

Discussion

The idea of an Undergraduate Library started 1949 with the school's idea of the construction of an underground library. The process started on September 21, 1966 with the groundbreaking of the new library and finished three years later with a dedication on November 15, 1969 (Leetaru, 2004).

The library is built around a 72 by 72 foot square central courtyard, the two-story 98,689 square foot library has a capacity of 150,000 volumes and seats 1,899 with 166 lounge chairs, 542 4x6 foot tables and 1,191 study carrels. Anticipating very heavy use of the new facility, the library was built with twin 26 by 72 foot entrances with circulations desks to allow books to be checked out at either one. Today only one of the entrances is in use (Kalev Leetaru, 2004). This information still holds true in 2011.

According to the Daily Illini, the library is open 24 hours a day, five days a week during the fall and spring semesters, with limited hours through the summer as well. During these time frames, the UGL offers many resources to U of I students. According to an interview with Lori Mestre, the UGL head, with the Daily Illini, "A lot of students come to the Undergrad (library) because they can get all of those [resources] in one place." Mestre said in the interview. Mestre also noted in the interview that the library's ability to meet various needs for students is the basis of its popularity.

The writers workshop located at the UGL is described on the University of Illinois' Library website as a place "where experienced tutors are available to help you." ("The Undergraduate Tour," n.d.) This resource is valuable to students because it is easy to use and really helps the student improve upon their writing skills. To take advantage of the Writers Workshop, a student simply needs to make an appointment to schedule a certain amount of time

with a tutor or simply walk in to the Writers Workshop during operating hours. (“The Undergraduate Tour,” n.d.)

Other resources that students can use at the Undergraduate library are the vast amount of computers and the enormous collection of media and gaming materials. Computers can be found virtually anywhere in the Undergraduate library. Each computer is preset to bring the student user straight to the “Undergraduate Library’s homepage which has link’s to the library’s online catalog, article databases, full texts of many reference sources and Web pages with information about the many libraries on campus.” (“The Undergraduate Tour,” n.d.) Each computer also has the full Microsoft Suite of products to help students with their research. For those students who are focusing more on a graphic design project, the library provides ten I-Macs that are each equipped with the Adobe and I-Life Suites. A very convenient feature of the UGL is that students who bring their own laptops can connect to the Internet via wireless anywhere in the building. Students are also allowed the use of a large media collection. “Included are a wide variety of materials on videocassette, audiocassette, CD, and DVD. Including feature films in more than a dozen languages, the complete Shakespeare plays, as well as documentary films about current issues, literature, history, psychology, chemistry, and other subjects” (“The Undergraduate Tour,” n.d.).

Ask a Librarian is an UGL resource meant for students to use at any time to contact a librarian or graduate assistant for research or library-related questions. There are five ways for students to get in contact with this resource: through instant message, text, email, phone, or in-person. Students are able to connect to the resource’s instant message services through their AOL Instant Message (AIM) name, askillinois, or the AIM widget on the UGL Web site. A student can SMS text message this resource from any text-supporting cell phone or call directly

using the number provided in the *Ask a Librarian* section of the UGL web page. A student can also fill out an email reference form on the page to get their questions answered within one business day. As for in-person help, this resource will direct a student to the reference desk on the upper level of the UGL. These services are beneficial to students because they are easily accessible and efficient at all times during the operating hours when a burning question needs to be answered.

The Undergraduate Library also offers students many study tables as well as work rooms. The study tables in the UGL are useful for students because they offer a quiet but communal study space that's good for concentration with room to spread one's work around if necessary. The tables also provide a place for students to relax and read, surf the web, or watch YouTube videos during the school day when they are not in class and need a break. The study tables and workrooms also provide students with a place to do group work because the UGL is generally a convenient place for all students to meet. The area containing the study tables is helpful for group work also because students are allowed to talk at a normal level. For a more intimate setting, students can use the group study rooms. "These study rooms are available on a first-come, first-served basis and accommodate up to six students and include a white board" ("The Undergraduate Tour," n.d.).

There are also office hours that provide students an opportunity to receive in-depth research assistance in a less open setting than the library research desk with UGL graduate assistants and librarian. According to the UGL's web site, students are paired up with an expert on numerous research problems who can also provide quick assistance for writing questions that would otherwise require an appointment at the Writers Workshop. According to the office hours page on the UGL's Web site, these office hours provide: assistance in selecting appropriate

resources for your topic; guidance for using advanced techniques in database searching; in depth term paper research counseling; assistance with brief writing questions; and help with citations.

With all of these resources readily available to the students that attend the University of Illinois, we wanted to find which resources students most frequently use. We also wanted to see if there was a correlation between their racial backgrounds, their use of the available resources, and their success at the university. Our original abstract (see appendix D) helped guide us in creating the questions that we asked on the surveys. The questions listed in appendix A were combined into one online survey. Our group decided to use an online survey generating website called Survey Monkey to create our survey. In order to get a wide range of people to take our survey in a quick and efficient manor we distributed through Facebook. Within two days we received 100 responses. The next step in our research process was to analyze our data and see what conclusions we could draw.

Out of the 100 students surveyed, the most common graduating year of the students we surveyed was 2014 corresponding to 62.0% of our survey group. Following 2014, 25.0% answered 2013, 10.0% answered 2012, and 3.0% answered 2011. The vast majority of the students we surveyed reported an overall GPA of 3.9-3.0; 12.0% reported a GPA of 2.9-2.0, 6.0% reported a GPA of 4.0, and about 1.0% reported a GPA of 1.9 or lower. We asked each student if they have ever used the Writers Workshop, tutoring, computers, media/gaming collection, study table, quiet space, study rooms, and *Ask a Librarian* and we received the following results: 6.9% used the writers' workshop, 0.0% used received help from the tutoring offered within the facility, 36.8% used the computers, 12.6% used the media/gaming collection, 85.1% used the study tables, 59.8% used the provided quiet space, 25.3% used the study rooms, and 26.4% said they have used the *Ask a Librarian* service. 55.6% of the students that we

surveyed reported that they used the UGL less than one hour every week. One of the questions on our survey asked students to rate the helpfulness of the UGL on a scale of 1-10 and about 60% of the responders rated the helpfulness of the UGL 1-5.

After the distribution of our surveys and the collection of our data we realized we needed to change the focus of our abstract and our project. Because our data suggested that there was no correlation between race and the resources people choose to use at the Undergraduate Library (70.0% of the responders were female, 29.0% male, and 1% transgender. The race question on our survey returned results of 80.0% White, 8.1% Asian, 6.1% Hispanic, 4.0% Black, 1.0% Middle Eastern and 0.0% Native American), we decided to revise our abstract to focus on the resources people use at the UGL and if they do not use the UGL, where do they choose to study and why.

In the end, the most significant data that we collected was centered around the question asking the surveyed participants to check all of the resources that they have used in the UGL. The results were not surprising when we discovered that 85.1% of the students reported that they use the study tables. There are so many tables available; students are able to collaboratively work with their peers on homework and school projects. The social environment of the first level of the UGL really promotes this behavior: It encourages group projects with its lack of restriction on noise, unlike the quiet, basement level. Next, we found that 59.8% of students use the quiet space located on the lower level of the UGL. This result was again not something that took our group by surprise. For those students who like to study in complete silence in order to minimize their distractions this is the ideal place to study. There are also personal carrels that allow for students to be isolated but also have a table. The use of the computers at the UGL was the next highest percentage. We found that 36.8% of students use this resource. This is not a shockingly

high number because many students have their own laptops that they carry with them in order to fulfill their technology needs. The next results were the writers workshop at 6.9%, *Ask a Librarian* at 26.4%, and finally tutoring inside the UGL at 0.0%. These resources are especially beneficial to the students because it gives them the ability to improve upon their abilities and get answers to the questions that they have. These are the resources that have the potential to have a strong positive impact on the students' success at the university, yet a strikingly low percentage of students actually take advantage of this opportunity. This made us question the effectiveness on the advertising the library is doing. The students cannot utilize a resource if they never knew that it was available and easy to use.

We found that most of our surveyed students used the Undergraduate Library less than 1 hour per week. This statistic is very important to use because it is a clear indicator that students are choosing to study elsewhere and we are interested in why they choose to study at other places. About the same percentages of people used the UGL for 1-2 hours, 2-3 hours, and 3-4 hours per week, 16.2%, 15.2%, and 10.1% respectively. This result is not surprising to us. We believe that most people who frequently use the UGL tend to use it as a place to relax and get some work done in between classes which would justify the percentages that each time interval received. Only about 3.0% of students reported using the UGL for 5 or more hours each week which could be a group of students who frequently enjoy the quiet study space the UGL offers or have frequent group projects they need to complete.

One of our most important findings is that most students who we surveyed rated the UGL 1-5 on a scale of 1-10 of how beneficial the UGL has been to them. This piece of data may be the result of students choosing other places to study therefore giving the UGL a low score. About 40% of the students we surveyed rated the UGL 6-10 with most of the responses being 6

or 7. We think students answered in this way because they mostly use the Undergraduate Library as a place to study while they themselves are doing most of the work, but they still acknowledge that the UGL has been helpful. Most students are going to give themselves the credit for how well they do and not the place where they study which explains why only 2.9% of our responders gave the UGL a score of 10.

Our survey shows that few of the surveyed would say the UGL is their top facility used on campus. From the responses collected, we concluded that many students use facilities more specific to their area of study here at the university. For example, when we asked what other facilities they use if not the UGL, there were many who wrote that they used the Business Instructional Facility (BIF). This building offers many of the same resources as the UGL such as study areas but it is more directed toward the use by students in the college of business. Another popular response to this particular survey question was Grainger Library. This is the engineering library so students in that field of study may find its resources more applicable to their studies. One student listed that he/she uses dorm study hours, Grainger, the Graduate Library, and the ACES Library because of the nicer environment and smaller amount of people there, but appreciates the qualities the UGL has that those do not:

The only problem is that the UGL stays up 24/5 and the rest of these libraries don't, so if I know that I am going to need to be at a library for a long extended period of time, then I go to UGL. I also go to UGL when I have an hour between classes because it is the most conveniently located out of all the libraries. (2011)

Using this response and others, we determined that the UGL should continue to offer the resources it does. There are still a percentage of students that take advantage of them. It also might be more helpful to students who have not defined what they specifically want to study. We

do believe that the library should continue to creatively advertise to get the word out there. People first have to be aware of the resources that are available before they can use them. The main ways students found out about the UGL was through campus tours, advertisements in introductory level courses, and through the library website. It is a constant need to continually review and revise what is offered to the students. Proposing changes, implementing approved changes, and evaluating the effects of the changes is a process that will improve the learning environment of the university leading its students to unimaginable successes.

Conclusion

We concluded from our data that many students became aware of the UGL through campus tours, advertisements in classrooms, or by teachers. The Undergraduate Library offers beneficial resources at no charge to students. Our findings suggest that most students who use the UGL use it for the study areas, the computers, and the quiet space. We also discovered the reason students use certain resources is based on mainly convenience because that is how most people choose what to use and what not to use. We think that continuing to advertise these resources to students will make them more effective.

A large percentage of the surveyed students said that the UGL had little to average impact on their GPA and we believe this is due to the fact that most students use the UGL for studying which could be done elsewhere, but they choose to use the UGL because of its convenience. The workshops that are offered at the UGL support the students learning and their improvement by helping with many projects during their entire academic career here at the University of Illinois. Another reason students may choose to use resources is dependent on which college they are part of here at UIUC; they may choose to use Grainger Library if they are engineering students etc. We hope to address ways in which the university can make certain resources more well known too students they at least know that they have the opportunity to use those resources if the need arises.

Recommendations for Further Research

As our study moved forward, we discovered a number of other aspects regarding student perception and use of resources at the UGL. We took a more broad approach of the topic, but as we mentioned the specifics inside of the library, further research could be done with those resources individually. Each resource such as the Writers Workshop could be specifically studied for the specific gender and race of the visitors, success of the program, and so on. The analysis of the different resources would provide for a more in-depth study of the specifics of the UGL.

One issue that we ran into was that the data we collected on the online survey could only be viewed in percentages. This inhibited our ability to directly correlate the responses of the survey respondents with their gender or racial background. This information could be viewed on the website at a certain charge that was not disclosed in the instructions and we chose not to pay the charges. To avoid this problem, we recommend distributing paper surveys.

Another study could be discovering why a high percentage of students do not utilize certain resources in the UGL such as the tutoring through the librarians' office hours. Asking questions, through the use of surveys and interviews, about what students would do to make the resources better known would provide solid answers for that research question.

We found that many students use other buildings particular to their area of study, therefore those can also be studied for their use on campus as separate research projects. Strong research on the advertisements of these resources can explain how these are meant to help students in the specific areas.

Appendix A

Survey Questions:

1. I have read and understood this consent statement and voluntarily agree to complete this survey.

☒ Yes

☐ No

2. Your gender:

Female

Male

Transgender

3. Your race/ethnicity:

Black

Native American

Asian

Hispanic

White

Middle Eastern

4. Graduating year:

2014

2013

2012

2011

5. GPA:

4.0

3.9-3.0

2.9-2.0

1.9 or lower

6. Which resources do you use in the UGL? Circle all that apply:

Writers Workshop

Tutoring inside the facility

Computing

Media/Gaming Collections

Study tables

Quiet Space

Study Rooms

Ask a Librarian

Other: _____

7. How did you find out the available resources in the UGL? _____

8. Hours a week you use the resources in the UGL

Less than 1 hour

1-2 hours

2-3 hours

3-4 hours

5 or more

9. On a scale of 1-10, how would you measure the successful impact these resources have made for you on campus taking into consideration your GPA, test/quiz results, involvement on campus, etc? _____

Appendix B

Gender:

Female	Male	Transgender
70.0%	29.0%	1.0%

Race:

Black	Native American	Asian	Hispanic	White	Middle Eastern
4.0%	0.0%	8.1%	6.1%	80.8%	1.0%

Graduating Year:

2011	2012	2013	2014
3.0%	10.0%	25.0%	62.0%

GPA:

4.0	3.9-3.0	2.9-2.0	1.9 or lower
6.0%	81.0%	12.0%	1.0%

Resources utilized:

Writers Workshop	Tutoring Inside the Facility	Computing	Media/Gaming Collection	Study Tables	Quiet Space	Study Rooms	Ask a Librarian
6.9%	0.0%	36.8%	12.6%	85.1%	59.8%	25.3%	26.4%

Hours a week:

Less than 1 hour	1-2 hours	2-3 hours	3-4 hours	5 or more hours
55.6%	16.2%	15.2%	10.1%	3.0%

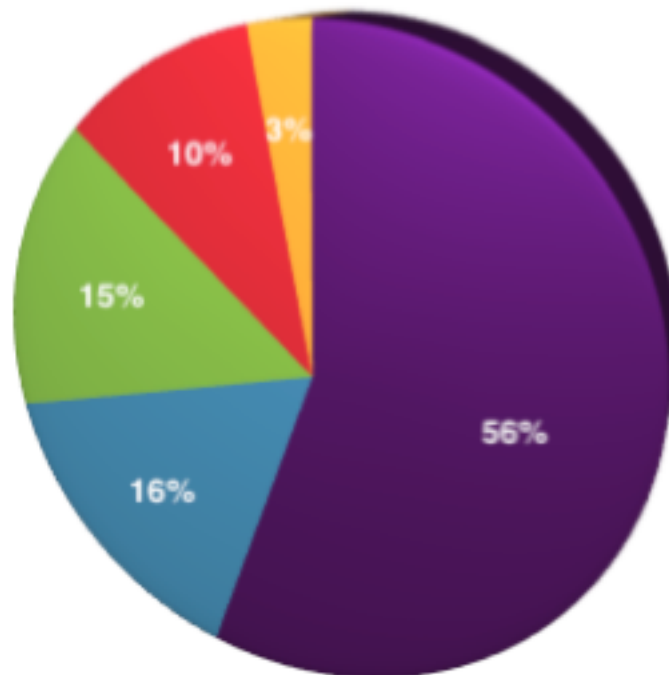
How beneficial on a scale from 1-10 (1 being the least, 10 being the most beneficial):

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
20.0%	6.8%	12.5%	5.6%	12.5%	22.7%	6.8%	10.2%	0%	2.9%

Appendix C

Hours a week Student's Utilize the Undergraduate Library:

● Less than 1 hour ● 1-2 hours ● 2-3 hours ● 3-4 hours ● 5 or more hours



Appendix D

Original Approved Abstract:

Through the use of surveys, interviews, and observations, we plan to examine the way students at the University of Illinois use their resources at the Undergraduate Library to study. The specific resources may include the internet, office hours, workshops, and tutoring. The success the students have in class may be correlated to the resources they use and whether the resources are connected to racial background, cultural background, and family customs. The study will help collect data that may be beneficial to other students. This data will be a collection of information about the optional resources and which ones have been most beneficial to them. We also plan to look into secondary sources that will enhance our study by providing further in depth analysis on our topic.

References

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